

Blyth Spartans 2, Wycombe Wanderers 1

A TRAGIC own goal by centre back Keith Mead in the 80th minute ended Wycombe Wanderers' hopes of appearing in the final of the last Amateur Cup competition on Saturday at Blyth Spartans, the Northern League champions.

Wycombe, at that stage, looked to have done enough to earn home advantage in the replay.

But one misdirected kick gave the game a completely different outcome as Jardine and Mead closed in on the Wycombe goal.

The players were outside the penalty area when the ball bobbed as Mead tried to pass back to goalkeeper John Maskell.

Off his line to receive the ball, Maskell stood like a statue as Mead's kick sailed over his head and finished up in the back of the net.

Wycombe tried in vain to pull back to level terms for the second time in the match, but it was not to be.

Blyth Spartans, a vastly experienced side, withstood the final assault to run out winners and quarter finalists for the second successive year.

Over the 90 minutes they just about deserved the verdict from this tremendous cup tie, full of incident and bursting with flowing, attacking football in front of a near 2,000 crowd.

The home side soon began to pressurise a shaky Wycombe defence which seemed content to hammer the ball clear of danger at every opportunity.

From one such clearance Perrin went close but Blyth were quick to regain the initiative when Alder dribbled into the Wycombe box and brought a brave save from Maskell.

The keeper injured his hand in halting the raid and this could well have played a part in the opening goal after 15 minutes.

Blyth won a corner which Dagless fired hard into the Wycombe six-yard box. Maskell dropped the ball at the feet of Slane, who slid home a rebound off the goal line to put Blyth one up.

With Alder dominating the middle of a rain soaked pitch, Wycombe were repeatedly caught out of position as Blyth exploited massive open space on either wing.

But Wanderers were also looking dangerous on the break and after Pritchard and Evans had gone close, they pulled back a fine equaliser.

Full-back Roger Grant received the ball on half way and put in a great run down the flank. Cutting in, he crossed accurately to the head of Evans who nodded on for Steve Perrin to slam home.

Now on level terms, Wycombe pressed strongly after a brief series of attacks from Blyth, Horseman rammed in one header which flew straight at keeper Varvill from Terry Reardon's free kick.

DICTATED

With only a few minutes remaining before half time, Spartans hit back with two raids.

Firstly centre forward Slane nodded high towards the roof of the net for Maskell to gather well and then the same man headed firmly past the upright after full back Smith had overlapped on the left.

The half time whistle saved the Blues from any further pressure and after the interval they dictated play for the first time in the match.

With balding Alder tiring, their force in midfield diminished and Wanderers were soon on the attack. Holifield ballooned the ball high over the top after Evans set up a scoring chance in the 53rd minute.

Play was halted while a spectator, who had run onto the pitch to argue with the referee, was ejected from the ground and after this incident, Blyth went close through Jardine who hit the side netting after a clever back header from the towering Slane.

Terry Reardon was booked for dissent in the 61st minute and Blyth hit back with some short, sharp attacks.

In going forward, Spartans were sometimes left exposed at the back and Perrin almost capitalised on their lack of numbers but shot too weakly and Varvill was able to save.

Blyth brought on substitute Pink for Alder in the 79th minute and one minute later Mead made about his only mistake of the game which resulted in Blyth's second goal.

Paul Birdseye replaced the injured Reardon in midfield soon afterwards but despite one corner and a couple of free kicks, Wycombe just couldn't break through again.

BLYTH SPARTANS

By
Andrew
Smith

THERE seems to be no stopping Blyth Spartans from reaching Wembley and taking the FA Amateur Cup in this, its final year.

Any doubts about the Spartans' attitude or ability were dispelled on Saturday when they outclassed Wycombe Wanderers, who represented one of the strongest Southern threats.

The Spartans were worthy winners of a match which was tense until the final minute.

Tragedy

But goalkeeping is still not coming easily for Blyth and in this respect only they were lucky to finish on top.

The first goal came in the 15th minute when Maskell dropped the ball he collected from a corner and gave Slane the chance he should never have had to pounce

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like a tiger and push it into the net as he lay on the ground.

The winner, with only nine minutes remaining, was a tragedy for the visitors. Lister played a long ball down the left and Jardine set off to chase. Defender Keith Mead got there just before him and lobbed it back high over his own keeper who had come off his line and could only watch helplessly as it bounced into the net.

Atrocious

Wycombe produced their best play in the first half when they were a goal down. They missed a golden opportunity to get on level terms when Holifield worked in well from the left and pushed a short pass to centre forward Evans, who fluffed his shot wide of the post.

But in the 23rd minute they scored with a superb goal which was easily the best of the day. Grant crossed from the left and Evans met it perfectly to head down into the path of Perrin, who volleyed it past Varvill.

Before the interval the match was a ding-dong affair with both teams

producing fine football on an atrocious pitch.

Perrin, who with Holifield was a constant menace, fired narrowly wide in the tenth minute and then Maskell saved bravely at the feet of Alder as the Spartans countered.

Slane split the defence down the left but his low cross was just behind Jardine who had run up the centre.

Alert

In the second half it was a case of who could last the pace in the conditions and Blyth came out on top.

Perrin looked dangerous as he raced down the left but the home defence was alert to it and blocked his raid well; Jardine then flicked a neat pass from Slane down the bye line into the side netting.

Reardon was somewhat harshly booked after obstructing Lister more than 30 yards out.

In the 80th minute Alder came off in preference for substitute Pink and a minute later Blyth got the second goal.

Wycombe and their 200 supporters, who travelled up through the night, seemed to throw in the towel and even after the substitution of Birdseye for Reardon did not lift their game.

It was an encouraging performance by Blyth. They were solid at the back and the only error — when Wycombe scored — could hardly have been prevented. They held their own in midfield against some high-class international opposition and Dagless was particularly effective. The forwards plugged away tirelessly and were on hand to force errors which produced goals to take the team into the quarter finals for the third successive season.

BLYTH SPARTANS: Varvill, Atkinson, Smith, Nixon, Scott, Philipson, Jardine, Ider, Slane, Lister, Dagless. Sub: Pink.

WYCOMBE WANDERERS: Maskell, Wood, Grant, Mead, Bullock, Reardon, Horseman, Pritchard, Evans, Holifield, Perrin. Sub: Birdseye.



An anxious moment for Wycombe Wanderers goalkeeper John Maskell as he saves this effort from Des Jardine against Blyth Spartans in Saturday's dramatic Amateur Cup tie. The Blues went down 1-2 with an own goal deciding the match.